auf Wiedersehen

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Gale "Buck" Cleven, John Clarence "Bucky" Egan, John Brady (Masters of the Air), Bernard "Benny" DeMarco, Various Germans, Some Americans, POWs - Character

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Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, Blood and Gore, Blood and Injury, Hurt No Comfort, Depression, Suicidal Thoughts, Character Death, Not Canon Compliant, prisoners of war, World War II, Abuse, Sad, Sad Ending, Established Relationship, i may be missing tags, but you get the picture

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by Winter_Girl

Summary

Life at the Stalag is comparatively good for the 100th. They get away with murder most days. John, more than the rest of them, makes it his personal vendetta to test the bounds of this relative freedom. The strain on his and Buck's relationship is palpable, and he feels like he's losing him.

Little does he know whose paying for his antics behind closed doors…

Please read the tags.

Disclaimer: The characters in this story are not intended to be representative, by any means, of the real life people (who they are clearly named after) involved in WWII. The premise is fiction about fiction based on some historical events.

Notes

Shit gets pretty dark. Here I make no promises of happy endings.

None of this is even remotely healthy or okay. I'm not romanticizing or endorsing any of this. But I'm sure as hell writing it, because I am, in fact, psycho.

That being said, thank you for the prompt!!! I hope I did it justice.

See the end of the work for more notes

John was never a man accustomed to indolence. Any kind of lul in excitement gave way to silence, and there was nothing he hated more than his own silence. It was full of… emptiness. He was well aware that he had nothing to go home to, it had become painfully obvious at the Stalag. Gale was in one his private meetings with Major Simoleit again. Between him and that goddamn German Colonel you'd swear Buck had switched sides the amount of time he spent in those meetings. Always seemed to come out of them sullen and withdrawn though. Sulking. John sighed. He missed him…

Things might have started out okay. It was not unlike their time in flight school, when they'd first started to explore the bounds of their… friendship. Because that's all it was in those days. But the benefits kept growing and growing, and before long they'd forgotten they were friends and they'd become the poster boys of the 100th. *Mommy and Daddy* Benny DeMarco liked to call them. Now those days felt like a distant memory.

They went from stealing moments in the showers and in unoccupied cabins around the camp to barely speaking in a matter of weeks. Gale wouldn't even let John touch him… He thought Gale knew him by now. Knew that he couldn't just let himself be pushed around like this. He had to stand up against these pigs. Had to leave 'em something to remember him by. And the boredom was killing him slowly.

But Buck couldn't forgive him for being himself here… Always telling him to 'shut up' and 'stop poking the bear'. John scoffed at the thought. When had Gale become so complacent to German rule. He hated it. What this place had turned *his* Buck into. A shadow of himself. Unwilling to fight, to stand up for himself or his men.

He clenched his jaw as the door to the Major's office opened and Gale stumbled out. He didn't even really look like Buck anymore. His eyes were too dark, his hair always dishevelled, and he was constantly wrapped up like he was freezing to death. Simoleit smiled sweetly at him before dismissing him. John's stomach turned. He hated how that fucking Kraut fawned over Gale. Openly flirted with him! And Gale just… let him.

Sometimes he couldn't help but wonder exactly *what* they were doing in those precious private meetings that Gale refused to tell him anything about. He was positively protective of them. It was the first thing Buck had snapped at him for here. John had only been teasing him then, but Gale just snapped. "Fucking leave it alone, John! It's

none of your concern!" And he'd stormed out. They didn't talk about it again, and that was months ago.

Gale met his eyes for a moment, and John almost thought he looked… like he'd been crying… But no, he shook it off. Gale always looked like that these days. Instead of coming over here, Buck made off towards Brady and started discussing something with him and the Colonel.

Anger boiled inside John then, he wasn't exactly sure why. But he marched off in the opposite direction, hands in his pockets, looking for a hornets' nest to kick so he could feel something again.

It happens as if he isn't even there. Not inside his own body. He elbows the German Colonel in the face, for what he can't remember. Maybe the guy just looked at him wrong.

Gale is the one yelling at him, clawing at his face, before the guards drag him off to the office. He sees the hurt in Gale's eyes, the… terror. He's scared out of his mind, and for a moment John wonders why fear would be his response. The German Colonel practically worshiped the ground Gale walked on. John spits on the ground before the door closes, shutting Gale and Colonel away out of sight. Before he realises what's going on, Brady decks him, square in the jaw.

"You *stupid*, selfish son of a bitch!" Brade is practically foaming at the mouth.

"The fuck is your problem!?"

"I thought you were supposed to love him!" Brady spits at him. A rabid rage blooming on his usually composed and collected features. DeMarco is holding him back.

"Johnny! You promised." Benny pleads.

"Fuck that, Benny! Jesus Christ, they're gonna kill him for this." John can't fathom what he's seeing. Brady's in tears, DeMarco seems to be close on his heals.

"The hell are you talkin' about?" John asks, his insides suddenly clenching up painfully.

"Nothin' Major. Just forget it." DeMarco bites off, his voice nearly

failing him as he continues to bear the brunt of Brady's weight as he falls to pieces. John had never seen them like this.

"To hell with that. What do you know that I don't, Benny?"

"Major please…" Benny pleads.

They're drawing a crowd, and in the little that remains of his higher order thinking John realises that this is not the time or the place. He turns on his heels are marches away through the crowd, trying to put together what just happened.

John's heart is pounding in his chest like a runaway freight train. What was he missing? He paces in circles, close to the edge of the camp, wracking his brain, desperately reaching for a subconscious hint… anything. But he'd been so damn wrapped up in his own misery lately that nothing stands out. Eventually his nerve fails, and he goes back to their cabin. He finds their Colonel there, looking contemplative and distant. Brady and DeMarco sit around the table in silence. Brady looks off into the abyss, his hands clasped together so hard they've turned white. Benny looks up at John, but he can tell that Benny doesn't really see him.

He sits down opposite Brady, and it's not lost on him that the Colonel promptly leaves without a word.

"Brady."

Brady looks away.

"If you don't tell me, I can't fix it." It's something he'd wanted to say to Gale months ago, but instead he'd started fights and fucked around with all the time he had to himself here. He was never good at talking, not even when it mattered.

"Major…"

"No!." DeMarco insists again.

"Goddamnit Benny. This can't go on!" Brady snaps.

Benny looks like a kicked dog. "We swore to him."

Brady shakes his head. "He's not my pilot Benny. I get why you can't do it, and you're welcome to leave. But this has to stop. You know as well as I do he can't take much more of this… They've had him in

there for more than an hour…. *Both of them*." He visibly shudders and almost balks at the last bit, forcing it out.

Benny leans over, kisses Brady's forehead and leaves solemnly. John feels like he's going to be sick.

Brady takes a shaky breath. "What do you think they do to him in there, huh?" The disgust and anger are tick in Brady's voice, dripping from his pores like miasma as he stares into John's soul. John couldn't answer him. He'd never really considered it too deeply. "You think they sit down and have a casual conversation over a cup of fucking tea?"

"Get to the point, Brady." John says in a measured tone. He didn't come here to be chastised.

Brady shakes his head. "You really are an arrogant self-absorbed bastard, John Egan." A tear runs down Brady's face and he wipes it off angrily, his overly long fringe falling across his eyes. "Every time one of us fucks up. Pisses 'em off… They have to take their kicks somewhere." His tone is strained, and the last part he says in little more than a whisper. "They take him apart, John… A little bit at a time. Sometimes it's just Simoleit and he doesn't get roughed up all that bad. At least the guy doesn't draw blood. But it doesn't stop him from…" Brady shudders, then continues, still in a whisper. "Other times the Colonel gets involved… And it gets ugly… You haven't seen him, John. What they go to him… He hides it from you, like a pro. But *Jesus Christ* man, how blind can you be…"

John isn't sure if it's the conviction in Brady's voice or the horror reflected in his eyes. He doesn't *technically* say it. He doesn't need to. Bile rises in John as the pieces fall into place. He's throwing up before his brain catches up to his body's visceral reaction. Brady's standing over him, no victory or spite in his eyes. He looks defeated and empty. "Sometimes, when he really can't bear it, I let them have me instead. I was just too slow today." He says before he walks out of the cabin, leaving what was left of John Egan on the ground, shaking violently and disintegrating. He doesn't move for what feels like hours. It takes every fibre of his being *not* to run up to the office and rip the doors open and murder them all with his bare hands. But he finds himself suddenly paralyzed with fear and shame in equal unbearable measure.

Eventually he finds the strength to sit up with his back against one of the bunks. Their Colonel appears in the doorway, like a phantom. "They're in the showers. It's bad."

John doesn't remember moving at all. The next thing he knows he's standing in the doorway unable to process what he's seeing. For a moment he believes he's dead and this is hell. This is his punishment. But John's not the one bleeding…

He stumbled forward, his legs giving out under him at the sight. Benny and Brady say nothing. Benny's the one in tears this time, Brady coldly stoic. Gale has an arm around Brady's neck for support. Blood drips steadily from his nose into his mouth, down the side of his face and from his chin, an angry gash gapes on his cheekbone and above his left eye. Blood runs down his thighs… pooling in the cold water by his feet. His ribs are bruised a deep dark blue, nearly black and there are nail marks down the length of his back… John nearly throws up again. He can't speak… he can't cry… he can't even stand. There are no words, in any language, that can paint even an abstract picture of what he feels.

Despite *everything*… Gale reaches for him weakly. Brady lets him go and John catches him in his arms. The boys leave in silence. John sits, fully clothed in the stream of cold water, holding onto Gale whose shivering and mumbling in his ear. Then he picks up on what he's saying and it breaks the last bit of John's resolve instantly.

"I'm sorry… I'm so sorry, John… 'm sorry."

"What in gods name are you sorry for…" he says through clenched teeth as a part of his spirit dies. "I did this."

"No!" Gale says insistently, more lucid now. "This is why I didn't want you to know…"

John cleans the blood off of Gale, bandages what he can, gets him dry and wraps him up in fresh clothes. Gale doesn't say much else. He's despondent, a frown on his face that hides both pain and devastation that John cannot even begin to fathom. He has a million questions but will ask none of them. He is not entitled to any answers. He had months… More than a year… His heart clenches painfully.

When they get back to the cabin, it's empty. John doesn't wonder why. He puts Gale to bed, tries to clean the wounds on his face, but he'll need stitches. John doesn't have the heart for it now. A few hours won't make a difference. John isn't sure if Gale falls asleep or passes out, but at some point he reaches out for John again and pulls him closer. "Don't leave me." He whispers. John wraps his arms around him as his heart shatters into million shards of ice. "Never."

The next morning John is sure he hasn't slept a wink. He's stuck in suspended animation, surrounded by the cold grey waters of the river Styx. The boatman stares at him accusingly from his subconscious.

Gale wakes, says nothing. Rises gingerly, painfully, being sauntering off without even looking at John. The cabin empties. John doesn't move. His resolve crumbles and he cries into the thread bare pillow, pleading for some kind of death, some reprieve from the crushing weight of this pain… this guilt. What cost had his arrogance borne the man he loved more than life itself?

Gale can't think straight. He wants to hate Brady for breaking his promise, but he can't. He understands. Still, this isn't what he wanted. He doesn't know what to say to John, how to put it into words… In truth, there are no words.

His entire body burns in agony, distracting him from the depths of shame and despair. A strange mercy, he thinks as the medic stitches his face, making the wounds bleed anew. These will scar, he knew this. It tastes bitter… The fact that no matter how far away he ever gets from this place, it will never leave his face.

Up until then they had refrained from marking him up where others could see. But there were some slights that were not so easily repaid.

At some point he will need to face John about this. He's resigned himself to that. But he can't bear to lose him. In the end, he doesn't remember much of what happened in that room the previous day. He'd learned to turn himself off… To escape reality in some profound way that he didn't care to explore too deeply. But there were some things you really didn't need to remember to know….

Later he finds John sitting on the floor in the corner of the empty cabin, staring into space, hugging his legs to his chest like a child. Gale sits down beside him, carefully because it hurts to move… to breathe…

"Why didn't you tell me…" John whispers, his words sound hollow and distant. It sends a shiver down Gale's spine.

"Because I didn't want this." His own voice is hoarse and threadbare.

“If I’d known…”

“You’d have what?” Gale asked, looking at John’s pained face searchingly. He needed him to *understand*. “I never wanted you to be anyone but yourself, John. You would have never made it…”

John looked away, covered his eyes with his hand. “So you traded yourself for my freedom.” It wasn’t a question.

“John…”

“Why would you do that?!” The look in John’s eyes when he finally did look at him was utterly destroyed and it made his breath catch in his throat.

“Because I love you. And I don’t want this place to change who you are.” The coldness that spread through him said it was too late for that now. That *knowing* had changed John anyway. That *everything* had been for nothing. He reached over and moved one of John’s curls out of his face and John pressed his cheek into the palm of Gale’s hand.

“I’m gonna kill ‘em all, Buck. I swear it.”

Gale shook his head, “Don’t talk like that.”

“I can’t just let this go!”

Gale’s heart sank, he knew this was coming, but wasn’t ready for it. “I know.” He whispered. “I’m sorry.”

“You keep saying that as if its your fault.” John protested. *It is*, Gale thought.

“I let it happen, John. I know that. And I know there’s no way around it. You don’t owe me anything… I understand.”

Confusion crossed John’s face. “What are you talking about? What do you mean?”

Gale looked away, his façade threatening to crumble. “I never expected you to forgive me for it… I let them ruin me. I made that choice without you. You didn’t sign up for this…”

Silence followed, breaking Gale’s heart just a little more.

“Gale.” It sent a shock through him. He could have counted the times that John had called him by his name on one hand… He turned to

look into those green eyes. “No German bastard is getting between us. I swear to god I’ll butcher them both in a heartbeat. But I am not losing you to them. Not unless you’re the one walking away. Because I fucking won’t.”

Gale doesn’t understand at first. Unable to change the direction his mind had been going in. “What?”

“You’re stuck with me. Until you’re the one telling me to fuck off, I’m not going anywhere.”

“John…”

“And this shit stops *today*. You hear me. No one is *touching* you again until you fucking ask ‘em to. Me included.”

Gale didn’t know what to do, what to say… He hadn’t pictured this. Never thought it was possible. He’d resigned himself to this being the end…

“Are you serious?”

“Of course I’m fuckin’ serious Buck. I love you. Jesus Christ. You really did all that thinkin’ I’d leave you for it…”

He knew it wasn’t really a question, and he was glad for it because he could have never answered it.

The order to march comes only a few days later. They march for days… Unending and unyielding. John loses his nerve again, a few times, but this time it is out of cold, dead, rage. There’s no retaliation out here. John makes sure of it, never letting Gale out of his sight. Gale sleeps in his arms again, for the first time in a year. It feels like home.

The last time that John loses it, it’s at the Colonel and after Gale pacifies him, he says to him it’s time to run… before John gets himself killed. He couldn’t bear that…

When they take their chance, his heart is beating up against his ribs. He hears John say, “keep goin’ I’m right behind ya.” But before they can make it to the wall there’s a scuffle somewhere behind him. A gunshot rings out and he hears John yell, “Go Buck! Get outa here.” It’s too dark… and there are too many people. He does what he’s told,

John's right behind him. The next words he hears are in German… Then there are more gunshots… It's only when they reach the forest that John falters.

It doesn't end with a bang. It ends with a whisper. A softly spoken apology for the broken promise. It hurts more than anything else ever had, and it never stops hurting. Not even 40 years later with a backyard full of grandkids and a whole plethora of new memories. On this day all there is, is the memory of a passage from a book he read in flight school. The quivering sound of a familiar voice making him promise to *live*. To live for the both of them… To love for the both of them. The taste of blood on his lips. The last bit of John Egan that Gale ever got to hold on to…

"Only death lasts forever", He whispers under the pine branch. Everything has to go dark. Even the sun will burn out. But don't worry, we are with you. One last time, so we sing. Goodbye. Goodbye. We'll meet again.

You have to go the last way alone. One last song, one last kiss… No miracle will happen. Goodbye. Goodbye. We'll meet again…

I had a nice time with you. You leave life quietly. The soul goes on a silent journey. Flesh will perish, spirit will rise. Being will surrender to death. In the end you are all alone. But we will be with you.

Everyone dies alone. But you will always be with us.

*Adapted from Rammstein's Adieu.

End Notes

I... uhm... so... I can't believe I just did that...

The last episode messed me up. I can't believe it's over...

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!